



THE ARC, AAIDD, AUCD,  
UCP, NACDD AND SABE

## FACT SHEET

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### AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

#### **Background**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) could be as many as 1 in every 100 American children. Continued research is needed to document trends in the growth of ASD, as well as research into and development of effective interventions. In 2006, President Bush signed into law the Combating Autism Act (CAA, PL 109-416). This law is unique in that it is wide-reaching by targeting and coordinating every available system in order to efficiently and effectively address this developmental disability that now affects one percent of the American population. The law focused on expanding research and coordination at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), increasing awareness and surveillance at the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and expanding the interdisciplinary training of health professionals to identify and support children with ASD and their families. This law will be up for reauthorization in 2011. Several provisions will expire if the law is not reauthorized in a timely manner.

While the CAA supported more efforts into research and surveillance, greater commitments are also needed to expand access to services for those with ASD. Services that are desperately needed include early intervention, education, supported employment, transition services and family supports. Individuals with ASD and their families need access to accurate information about scientifically-supported interventions. The training of a wide range of interdisciplinary professionals to provide these services must also be a top priority. A well-trained workforce will ensure that the findings coming out of our research institutions can be translated and made available to parents and providers across the country, and will ensure that services can be implemented as quickly as possible.

#### **Action Taken by Congress and the Administration**

On April 2, 2009, Sens. Durbin (D-IL), Casey (D-PA), and Menendez (D-NJ) introduced the *Autism Treatment Acceleration Act* (S. 819). A companion bill was introduced in the House (H.R. 2413) by Reps. Doyle (D-PA) and Smith (R-NJ). This bill would accelerate the development of a service system to meet the needs of individuals with ASD and related developmental disabilities.

The bill creates demonstration projects to increase access to quality health care services and coordination of care, as well as to develop and provide an array of services to adults with ASD; establishes a national network to link research and service initiatives at the federal, regional, state

and local levels; and establishes a multiyear national training initiative on autism and a technical assistance center to significantly develop and expand interdisciplinary training and continuing education on ASD.

A requirement that health insurers cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, including Applied Behavior Analysis, assistive communication devices and other effective treatments is also added.

### **Recommendations**

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress should:

- Reauthorize and fully fund the Combating Autism Act
- Support the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act and other legislation that addresses the direct service and interdisciplinary training needs associated with the increasing number of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

### **Relevant Committees**

House and Senate Appropriations Committees

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

House Energy and Commerce Committee (Subcommittee on Health)

House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations  
Subcommittees

For more information, please contact The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy Disability Policy Collaboration (202-783-2229), Association of University Centers on Disabilities (301-588-8252), AAIDD (202-387-1968), or National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (703-739-4400), or SABE (phone).

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